

AGENDA

- I. Welcome
 - A. Introduction
- II. How to Parent the Sexually Abused Child
- III. Behaviors Connected to Sexual Abuse
- IV. State The Rules
- V. Responding to Challenging Behaviors
- VI. Preventing Allegations
- VII. Factors that Influence Healing

Characteristics Which Are Helpful In Parenting a Traumatized Child

- ◆ A willingness to be different, or experience embarrassing situations.
- ◆ An ability to wait for the child's trust of you and your family to develop.
- ◆ A sense of hope that this child will make it and develop healthy interactions with the "world".
- ◆ A willingness to accept training and help (i.e. respite, education by social worker, etc.)
- ◆ A willingness to accept the child and his/her history.
- ◆ A sense of humor.

WAYS TO SUPPORT A CHILD WHO HAS BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED

- Let the child know you are there for them; be supportive without being pushy.
- Allow the child to be honest and open about his or her feelings. Open communication is both positive and healthy.
- If the child is creative, encourage it. This is also a way for the child to communicate his or her feelings.
- Be open and honest with the child about what has and will happen to them.
- Recognize the child when he or she has done something good. This will provide positive reinforcement and strengthen self-esteem.
- Have the child participate in extracurricular activities – especially sports. This will allow energy to be focused outward.
- Help him or her remember that he/she is still a child and that it is OK to have fun.
- Have family rules, guidelines and schedule. This will provide structure for the child.
- Make privacy a priority. This will help the child to feel safe.
- Provide a safe environment to prevent further sexual abuse.

COMMON ISSUES FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES PARENTING SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN

- Compulsive or public masturbation
- Suicide attempts
- Self-mutilation
- Seductive behavior
- Promiscuous behavior with peers
- School problems

Foster And Adoptive Family House Rules

Define your family's "house rules." Some recommendations are:

- Knock before entering bedrooms/bathrooms
- Nudity is only permitted in bathrooms and the privacy of your own bedroom
- Appropriate clothing is expected (robes, underwear, etc.)
- Bathing and dressing oneself is expected unless the child is developmentally unable
- No kisses on the mouth
- Only appropriate touches are allowed (Be specific for a child)
- If any inappropriate touching occurs, the child must tell someone with whom they feel safe and that someone must be an adult
- No swimming in pool unless an adult is present
- Parent must know where you are at all times
- School attendance is expected
- No pornography
- You can say "No" to an adult
- No wrestling or tickling

Define specific rules about affection and contact: (especially important for sexually abused children)

- Hugs/Kisses? - no kissing in bed
- Sleeping arrangements? Who sleeps where? (in Foster Care: Each child should have his or her own bed).
- It is strongly recommended that affection should be carried out in public spaces, which promotes safety.

Define specific rules for areas of the house and privacy:

- Bathroom
- Bedrooms

Teach children to KNOCK when a door is closed!

Guidelines For the Sexually Abused Child

Privacy is something everyone has a right to. Children should be taught to knock when a door is closed and adults need to role model the same behavior.

Bedrooms and Bathrooms: These two locations are often prime stimuli for children who have been sexually abused, since abuse commonly occurs in these rooms.

Wrestling and Tickling: As common and normal as these childhood behaviors are, they are often tinged with sexual overtones. They can put the weaker child in an overpowered and uncomfortable or humiliating position. Try to keep tickling and wrestling to a minimum.

Clothing: It is a good idea for family members to be conscious of what they wear outside of the bedroom. Seeing others in their underclothes or pajamas may be over stimulating to a child who has been sexually abused.

Saying “No”: Children need to learn that it is their right to assertively say “no” when someone touches them in a way they do not like. Help them to practice this.

Touching: No one should touch another person without permission. A person’s private parts (the area covered by a bathing suit) should not be touched except during a medical examination or, in the case of young children, if they need help with bathing or toileting.

Sex Education: All children, including the child who has been sexually abused, need basic information about how they develop sexually. They also will benefit from an atmosphere in which it is OK to talk about sex. Appropriate words for body parts, such as penis, vagina, breasts and buttocks, will give the child the words to describe what happened to him or her. Suggestive or obscene language is sometimes a trigger for old feelings for a child who was sexually abused, and should not be allowed.

Guidelines For the Sexually Abused Child

No “Secrets”: Make it clear that no secret games, particularly with adults, are allowed. Tell children if an adult suggests such a game, they should tell you immediately.

Being Alone With One Other Person: If your child is behaving seductively, aggressively or in a sexually acting out manner, these are high-risk situations. During those times, it is advisable not to put yourself in the vulnerable position of being accused of abuse. In addition, other children may be in jeopardy of being abused. Therefore, whenever possible during these high-risk situations, try not to be alone with your child or allow him/her to be alone with only one other child.

Behaviors and Feelings: Help children differentiate between feelings and behaviors. It is normal to have all kinds of feelings, including sexual feelings. However, everyone does not always act on all the feelings he or she has. Everyone has choices about which feelings he or she acts on, and everyone (except very young children) must take responsibility for his or her own behavior.

General Guidelines for Providing A Safe Environment

- ✓ Know your child's schedule and who they are with at all times
- ✓ Have a specific list of who is permitted to pick your child up from school
- ✓ Beware of any person (older child or adult) whom constantly plays with little children
- ✓ Check references on all babysitters
- ✓ Be aware of changes in your child's behavior

JOSEPH

Joseph is 10 years old and was placed in foster care a year ago. His resource family, the Johnson's are considering adopting Joseph, but they have concerns about his behavior. His Uncle sexually abused Joseph for 3 years. His Uncle, sometimes with objects, sodomized Joseph and he was forced to perform oral sex.

Lately, Joseph has begun to exhibit very aggressive behavior. He has been bullying younger kids at school and in the neighborhood. Last week he got into a fight on the bus and was suspended for 3 days. Joseph has also been doing poorly grade wise and he has been having nightmares a couple of times a week.

- What challenging behaviors can you identify with Joseph?
- By behaving this way, what do you think Joseph really wants?
- What can the Johnson's do to support Joseph?

Possible Answers for Joseph:

Behaviors:

- Aggressive Behavior
- Bullying
- Fighting at School
- Poor grade
- Nightmares

What does Joseph want?

- to feel close to someone; to get affection and attention.
- to feel valued as a person and worthy of love.
- to feel in control of his or her life.
- to achieve in school
- to feel safe and secure.

What can the Johnson's do to help Joseph?

- Let the caseworker know what is going on; be specific in reporting the child's behavior.
- Do not overreact. But also do not ignore or make light of the behavior.
- Talk openly and specifically about the behavior, why it is inappropriate, why it can be unsafe and what types
- Explain how to work through anger and self-hatred
- Discuss the appropriate way to express anger (non threatening and non aggressively)
- Demonstrate how to feel emotions honestly and directly

MICHELLE

Michelle is a twelve year-old girl who was placed in foster care after being sexually abused by her mother's boyfriend. The abuse was identified after she became pregnant at eleven years-old. Michelle has been in care for 18 months, and it seems unlikely that she will be able to return home. Her mother is in jail for allowing the abuse to continue and her father's whereabouts are unknown.

The sexual abuse began when Michelle was around 9 years of age. Michelle is with her third foster family. The two previous foster families asked for her to be removed, complaining that she was too difficult to handle. She has been with the Thompson family for three months. They are quite concerned about how emotionally needy she seems to be. Michelle is much more affectionate than their own children and seeks out body contact, especially with Mr. Thompson and the Thompson's oldest son David who is 15. She tries to sit in Mr. Thompson's lap David has commented that it makes him uncomfortable how close Michelle sits next to him. Michelle has even tried to kiss Mr. Thompson on the lips, and once she tried to put her tongue in his mouth.

- What challenging behaviors can you identify with Michelle?
- By behaving this way, what do you think Michelle really wants?
- What can the Thompson's do to support Michelle?

Possible Answers for Michelle:

Behaviors:

- Sexually acting out
- Inappropriate body contact with Mr. Thompson and David

What does Michelle want?

- to feel close to someone; to get affection and attention.
- to feel valued as a person and worthy of love.
- to feel in control of his or her life.
- to feel safe and secure.
- to feel that the sexual abuse will not happen again.

What can the Thompson's do to help Michelle?

- Let the caseworker know what is going on; be specific in reporting the child's behavior.
- Enroll Michelle in sex education programs. Classes are often available in the school.
- Enroll her in extracurricular activities – so that she has other ways to expend her energy, can develop friendships and can experience fun. In other words remind her what it is to be a child.
- Do not overreact. But also do not ignore or make light of the behavior.
- Talk openly and specifically about the behavior, why it is inappropriate, why it can be unsafe and what types of behavior would allow the child to get the affection he or she really needs.
- Set rules and guidelines clearly.
- Give Michelle other options for expressing affection, Kiss on the cheek, Hugging in appropriate ways,
- Suggest other ways to get attention.
- Recognize what Michelle is doing and why but also provide support and structure for her to change her behavior.

Supporting the Sexually Abused Child with Challenging Behaviors

There are several ways resource parents can meet the emotional needs of a child who has been sexually abused.

- Support and nurture the child.
- Tell and show the child that he or she is worthy and deserves to feel safe and protected – emotionally and physically.
- Enroll the child in sex education.
- Encourage child to communicate openly, and share feelings.
- Be clear about with family rules, what is and is not acceptable and about the consequences for misbehavior.
- Be honest and straightforward about what has and will happen.
- Be aware of behaviors and reason for the behavior but do not make light of the behavior.
- Help the child connect with birth family. If contact cannot be direct, talking about the family or looking at pictures can be an option.

The challenging behavior a child exhibits is a sign of an inner desire. By behaving a certain way, the sexually abused child may really want or need to:

- feel safe and secure.
- feel that the sexual abuse will not happen again.
- feel close to someone; to get affection and attention.
- experience physical pleasure in a safe environment.
- feel valued as a person and worthy of love.
- feel in control of his or her life.
- achieve in school

Supporting the Sexually Abused Child with Challenging Behaviors

To achieve this, the child may need to learn:

- the appropriate way to express anger (non threatening and non aggressively).
- how to feel emotions honestly and directly.
- how to express low self-esteem.
- how to work through fear and loss of control related to the sexual abuse.
- how to work through feelings of vulnerability.
- how to feel capable and successful.
- how to work through anger and self-hatred.

How To Respond To Challenging Behavior

What a Child Does

Sexually Acting Out with other children or the foster or adoptive parent.

How to Respond

Be straightforward with the child as to what behavior is acceptable – hugs and kisses on cheeks and what types are not - kissing on the lips, touching in inappropriate ways. Establish the rules in a definitive but caring manner.

What a Child Does

Compulsive Masturbation privately and publicly, sometimes using objects.

How to Respond

Be aware of the frequency of masturbation.
Communicate this with the caseworker.

Avoid sexual stimuli in the home and the child's environment (i.e., videos, magazines).

Make privacy a priority with family rules and explain that while masturbation is natural, it is done in private.

What a Child Does

The child may cause injury to his or her self or show signs of **Self-Mutilation**

How To Respond To Challenging Behavior

How to Respond

Ensure that the child receives counseling individual and/or group sessions

Lock up items that can be used to cause bodily injury including knives and scissors.

What a Child Does

Exhibit **Aggressive Behavior** toward other children.

How to Respond

Show how to be angry without being aggressive. For example, use even tones and calm behavior when disagreeing with others, let the child see you behaving in a non-threatening way,

Teach the child how to express anger verbally rather than physically.

Provide options for expressing anger with physical activity instead of aggressive behavior i.e., punching a bag, scream into a pillow, run a mile or shoot baskets until the anger has dissipated.

What a Child Does

Show signs of alcohol or other drug abuse.

How to Respond

Provide substance abuse assessment and individual and family counseling.

Encourage the child to join Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous.

How To Respond To Challenging Behavior

Have open discussions others who have abuse issues and the impact the addiction has on them.

Provide information about addiction and recovery

What a Child Does

Run away for hours or days.

How to Respond

Immediately report to the police then notify the agency

Establish consequences for running away; have the child participate in establishing the rules

Allow the child to have play dates with or visit previous friends (from school or neighborhood).

What a Child Does

Bring home bad reports, grades, or skip school

How to Respond

Encourage the child to do better in school.

Have open communication with the school and assist in establishing support and expectations.

If the child is afraid at school, attend school with him or her - until he or she feels safe.

What a Child Does

The child may threaten to commit suicide or take steps toward committing suicide

How to Respond

Be empathetic. Express an understanding for why the child feels as she or he does.

Lookout for signs and symptoms of depression.

How To Respond To Challenging Behavior

Ensure that the child receives counseling.

Recognize good behavior

What a Child Does

Have nightmares and fears of persons from a specific gender or race or have a fear of a particular place or type of place.

How to Respond

Establish a bedtime routine and encourage a feeling of safety by reading to the child, leaving a night light on or giving a stuffed animal.

Acknowledge the child's fears. This will help to build trust.

Reassure the child by discussing the safety of the home and the privacy of his or her room.

Teach child how to protect themselves when feeling threatened or unsafe. Explain that you and others (specifically name individuals) will help him or her to be safe.

Tools to Prevent Allegations

Many of these tools apply to all children in care.

Be specific on house rules of dress, privacy, touch, etc.

Become comfortable talking about sexual abuse, sexuality, and personal boundaries and space.

Never use physical punishment (Foster parents are prohibited to use any form of physical means to discipline a child).

Avoid tickling a sexually abused child.

Avoid using sarcasm or suggestive language.

Maintain a log of sexually acting out behaviors and report to the social worker immediately by phone and in writing.

Log any time a child seriously confuses you with another person, especially a previous abuser. Inform social worker immediately.

Document actions taken to deal with inappropriate behavior.

Do not allow a child who is sexually reactive (currently displaying signs of sexual abuse) to be alone with another child or adult.

Provide child with his/her own bedroom if possible. (This is very important for a sexually reactive child)

Create a support system for family members.

Take care of yourself and create some personal time for yourself.

Continue to attend training and seek out information from reliable sources.

Use the foster parent association for support.

Speak to the child's therapist on current issues and treatment.

Do not force a child to speak about his/her abusive history.

Tools to Prevent Allegations

Always report suspected abuse to the agency or your case manager, especially after parent visits.

Keep a log or notebook on each child to document visitation, medical appointments, behavioral patterns, or changes and efforts to teach acceptable behavior.

Document serious conflicts with parents, children, case managers, teachers, etc.

Keep parents informed of positive progress their child is making.

Seek outside resources and assistance immediately if behaviors or issues are beyond your abilities to deal with them.

Have visitor's sign a page in the log or notebook. Sometimes a biological parent will claim that a resource parent won't let them visit their child. This will provide support that you are working on reunification with the primary parent.

Invest in a Polaroid camera with date stamping. If the child has unsupervised visits take pictures before and after the visit.

(Adapted from American Foster Care Resources, Inc.)